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ABSTRACT

Results are presented of a study describing an attitude profile of undergraduate students at entry level in a teacher preparation program at West Virginia University. The study sought to identify attitudes and levels of commitment with which young people enter preparation for the profession of teaching. Questions addressed are: (1) What is the level of commitment to the teaching profession after one semester in a preparation program? (2) What influenced the decision to choose teaching? (3) What attitudes about teaching do these students bring to the program? (4) What attitudes toward children/youth do they hold? and (5) What are their career goals? A survey was conducted with students enrolled in an "Introduction to Education" course in the Fall, 1983 and Spring 1984 semesters. A total of 356 responses were received. Statistical information on responses to specific questions is presented in tables. In an analysis of total responses, a profile emerged of young adults possessing the kinds of attitudes, motivation, and commitment to the teaching profession that is vital in creating learning environments in schools that are caring, open, and challanging. Implications are discussed for possible changes in emphasis in teacher education programs. (JD)

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Entry Level Profile: Student Attitudes Toward the Teaching Profession

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Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, Illinois, March 31--April 4, 1985.

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Entry Level Profile: Student Attitudes
Toward the Teaching Profession

With both the quality of education and the status of the teaching profession so much in question recently, it seems vital that teacher educators evaluate entry level students, not only academically, but attitudinally, as well.

Some recent surveys indicate that education majors tend to be at the bottom rung of the achievement ladder as reflected in SAT and GPA scores; other surveys are reporting that the "more able" teachers tend to leave teaching after electing teaching as a career. The general public, incited by the recent flurry of national reports, clamor for higher standards in schools and more competent teachers; while teachers, striving to gain recognition as professionals, clamor for better compensation.

In response, most schools/colleges of education have been busy in recent months shoring up admission standards, tightening curricula, instituting minimum competency tests, and reorganizing their recruitment efforts.

Amidst, the uproar little attention is being giving to teaching potential as reflected in attitudes, sense of commitment and future goals of prospective teachers. Who are these young women and men who despite the problems, choose teaching as their career? Will achievement score data alone provide enough information on these entry level students? What would a profile of their attitudes say to teacher educators as they revise or recreate the learning experiences that will best prepare future teachers? Would the information help in the screening and advising of students as they move along in their preparation programs? Can such data assist in planning strategies for recruitment?

The researchers hypothesized that the collection of such data would be useful in answering these questions, as well as in suggesting questions for further research. This paper presents the results of a study which describes an attitude profile of undergraduate students at entry level in a teacher preparation program at West Virginia University. The profile is an initial attempt to become sensitive to the attitudes and levels of commitment with which young women and men enter preparation for the profession of teaching. Specifically, the study addresses the following questions:

- What is the level of commitment to the teaching profession after one semester in a preparation program?
- What influenced the decision to choose teaching?
- What attitudes about teaching do these students bring to the program?
- What attitudes toward children/youth do they hold?
- What are their career goals?

Data Source

Students enrolled in the prerequisite course "Introduction to Education" were the data source for the study. These students represent the total range of teacher preparation programs available through West Virginia University.

The "Introduction to Education" course is designed to help students make an informed career decision about the teaching profession. The content and activities involved in this course are designed to help students become familiar with the roles of teachers, students, parents, and administrators in American education. For approximately three-fourths of the study population, this course is their first professional education experience. It includes an early field experience.

Methodology

The Pilot

A survey questionnaire addressing each objective was developed and field tested with 186 students enrolled in the introductory course during the second to last class session, Spring, 1983. This survey, voluntary and anonymous, served as the pilot study. One hundred three surveys (55.3%) were returned and the responses were categorized through a content analysis, coded and tallied by category. Based on the preliminary findings, the questionnaire was refined.

The Current Study

The refined survey was repeated with students enrolled in the introductory course during the Fall, 1983 and Spring, 1984 semesters. In Fall 1983, 230 surveys were distributed and 199 (86.5%) were returned. In Spring 1984, 180 surveys were distributed and 157 (87.2%) were returned. (Total = 356)

Categories for the open-ended responses were derived from a systematic content analysis of key phrases. Category definitions based on key phrases were developed and the two researchers then coded each response with 90% interrater reliability. (Fischer Interrater Reliability Formula) Coded data were computerized and processed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS-X) program.

Demographics: Participants were asked to indicate their class rank, certification levels, and sex.

Table 1

Class Rank

Class Rank	Number of Responses	Percent of Response
Freshman	103	30.0
Sophomore	118	34.4
Junior	94	27.4
Senior	28	8.2
	n = 343	100%

The intent of the "Introduction to Education" course is to help students make a career decision about teaching. The majority of students are Freshmen and Sophomores (64.4%) who do have time to change their decision without substantially lengthening the time in college. Juniors (27.4%) are still able to make a change to some extent, but Seniors (8.2%) are in a difficult position.

Table 2

Students For Whom This Is The First Education Course

First Education Course	Number of Responses	Percent of Response
YES	253	74%
NO	89	26%
	n = 342	100%

For the majority (74%) this was the first education course they have taken, which is the intention of the program sequence. Others because of program scheduling conflict have delayed the course.

Table 3

Sex

Sex	Number of Responses	Percent of Responses
Male	118	33.8
Female	231	66.2
	n = 349	100%

Females constituted 2/3 of the students in the course which is fairly representative of our education majors as a whole. In looking at Table 4 males and females have almost equal numbers in both the K-12 and Secondary certification groups, but females constitute a large majority in the elementary certification group.

Table 4

Certification Level By Sex

Certification Level	Male	Female
K-12	35	43
Elementary	11	115
Secondary	66	68
	n = 112	n = 226

Analysis/Interpretation of Data*

COMMITMENT TO TEACHING

- How do you feel about a career in teaching?

Table 5

Entry Level Students' Commitment to Teaching

Level of Commitment	Number of Responses	Percent of Respondents
Definitley Not Interested in Teaching	7	2.0
Doubtful About Teaching	16	4.5
Neutral About Teaching	20	5.6
Favorable Toward Teaching	129	36.3
Very Sure About Teaching	183	51.5
	n = 355	100%

Over half (51.5%) were very sure they wanted to teach, with 36.3% favorably inclined. Twenty students (5.6%) expressed neutrality (not strongly inclined one way or the other); while 16 (4.5%) were doubtful (not completely rejecting teaching, but doubtful about it). Only 7 (2%) were definitely not interested in becoming a teacher.

Since a primary purpose of the Introductory course is to help students make an informed career decision, response to this question is very helpful in advising students. If asked pre and post semester, response to this question could be useful as a departure point for conferences with those students who feel neutral or negative about teaching in order to counsel these students effectively.

Additional analysis of this item revealed some interesting information.

Table 6

Commitment to Teaching by Class Rank

Level of Commitment	Freshman n = 102 Percent of Respondents	Sophomore n = 118 Percent of Respondents	Junior n = 93 Percent of Respondents	Senior n = 28 Percent of Respondents
Definitely Not	2.9	3.3	0	0
Doubtful	4.9	3.3	5.4	7.1
Neutral	3.9	5.9	8.6	3.6
Favorable	29.3	38.2	35.4	67.9
Very Sure	59.0	49.3	50.6	21.4

n = 341

*Combined data for Fall 1983 and Spring 1984 surveys are reported in all instances except for the item on "Relatives Who Are Teachers".

Percentages by class rank reveal few surprises. The vast majority of entry level students are either very sure they want to teach, or favorably inclined regardless of their rank. One notable difference does appear. While half of the students who are Freshman, Sophomores and Juniors say they are very sure about teaching, only 21% of the Seniors appear to be certain. This is cause for some concern considering how late it is in their training. This information can assist us in examining what Seniors may be experiencing in their program sequence which would relate to their difference in attitude and perhaps lead us to program sequencing revisions.

Table 7

Commitment to Teaching by Sex

Level of Commitment	Percent of Males n = 118	Percent of Females n = 229
Definitely Not	1.0	2.5
Doubtful	8.0	2.5
Neutral	9.0	4.0
Favorable	45.0	32.0
Very Sure	37.0	59.0

n = 347

Overall, the male students in this sample express more doubts and neutrality about their commitment to teaching than do the females. Thirty-seven percent (37%) of the males indicated that they were very sure about teaching compared to 59% of the females.

INFLUENCES TO TEACH

A portion of the survey dealt with the forces that influence people to choose teaching as a career. Respondents were asked:

- What prompted you to choose teaching as a profession?
- Do you have close relatives who are teachers?
- If you no longer want to teach, what changed your mind?

Table 8

Influences on Entry Level Students' Choice of Teaching As a Career

Category of Influence	# of Responses	% of Responses	% of Respondents
Enjoy Working with Children/People	172	34.3	50.3
Help Others Learn	90	17.9	26.3
Interest in Subject Matter	68	13.5	19.9
Act/Process of Teaching	49	9.8	14.3
The Profession	33	6.6	9.6
Family Influence	25	5.0	7.3
Teacher Influence	25	5.0	7.3
Desire to Improve Schools	16	3.2	4.7
Childhood Dream	14	2.8	4.1
No Strong Influence	6	1.2	1.8
Easy Major	4	0.8	1.2

number of responses 502 100%
number of respondents 342

A total of 502 responses were made to this question; eleven categories of influence emerged. Some respondents indicated more than one influence, up to four in some instances. "Enjoy working with children and people" was mentioned by over 50% of the respondents, while "desire to help others learn" accounted for an additional 26.3%. These two areas are the overwhelming motivators for this population of entry level students.

Nearly 20% of the respondents indicated their interest in subject matter as an influence. (Later analysis showed that these were mainly secondary majors and K-12 majors in music, P.E. and vocational agriculture).

Over 14% of the respondents noted the influence of the act or process of teaching ("stimulation of teaching"; "natural teaching ability"; "previous teaching experience"). An additional 9.6% identified "the profession" itself as an influence ("respect for the profession"; "the profession recommended"; "good work schedule").

An equal percent of respondents (7.3%) identified family and former teachers (or past school experience) as positive influences, while 4.1% reported that becoming a teacher had been a "childhood dream."

Six respondents (1.8%) revealed that little thought was given to the choice of teaching as a career (e.g. "process of elimination"; "had difficulty choosing a profession"; "something to fall back on"). For four students (.8%), teaching was chosen because it was "an easy major."

Table 9

Entry Level Students' Reasons For Leaving Teaching

Category of Reasons	# of Responses	% of Responses	% of Respondents
Other Professions More Suitable	19	35.2	41.3
Low Pay/Scarce Jobs	13	24.1	28.3
Just Undecided	6	11.1	13.0
Doubt Teaching Ability	4	7.4	8.7
Preparation Program Inadequate	4	7.4	8.7
Miscellaneous	3	5.7	6.6
Low Status of Teaching/Education	3	5.6	6.5
Discipline Problems in the Schools	2	3.7	4.3
Total	54		
	n = 41	100%	

Since only 16 respondents had expressed doubt about teaching, and only 7 had rejected it altogether (Table 5), expectedly, responses to this item were few - 41 out of 350. A total of 54 responses were given. Over one-third of the students responding to this question appear to have changed their minds about teaching because of the negative image of the profession: (Low pay/scarce jobs; discipline problems; low status). However, 50% identified their own incompatibility with teaching, indicating that other professions were more suitable for them or that they may not have the ability to teach.

For 11 of the students, indecision about a career is still a strong factor. Student responses to this item were thoughtful and seemed to reflect an appreciation of the realities of teaching. The question remains: What should we do about these 41 students for whom teaching may not be the best career choice? Again, the survey could become an important instrument in the advising component of the teacher education program.

Table 10

Percent of Entry Level Students Whose Family Members Are Teachers*

Category	Number of Responses	Percent of Responses
NO	268	75.1
YES	89	24.9
	n = 357	100%

*Spring 1984 Data Only

Response to this question suggests that the influence of family may be indirectly stronger than indicated by students' response to the question of what prompted them to choose teaching. Only 7.3% mentioned family influence in the previous question, while nearly 25% of our entry level students report that a close family member (mother, father, sister, brother, aunt, uncle, grandparents) is an educator.

The motives of the entry level students in this study do not appear to be very different from those expressed by other education majors in recent surveys. Wood (1978) reports that students in her survey seemed to be motivated primarily by intrinsic factors ("personal experience with children", "liking for children") rather than extrinsic factors "influence of teachers, relatives," "advantages of the job"). She noted that a review of similar research (1955-1978) indicates a definite shift from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation. This study corroborates her findings. A relatively small percent of students report "other adults" as an influence, and none report "job security" - two areas high on the list in earlier research (Fielstra, 1955) and (Haubrich, 1960).

ATTITUDES TOWARD TEACHING

A major portion of the survey dealt with questions about entry level students' attitudes toward teaching. Students were asked to describe briefly:

- Their attitude toward teaching as a profession
- What they hoped to accomplish as a teacher.

Table 11

Entry Level Students' Attitudes Toward Teaching As a Profession

Attitudes Toward Profession	Number of Responses	Percent of Responses	Percent of Respondents
Important Profession	125	32.2	43.7
Rewarding Profession	113	29.1	39.5
Underrated Profession	81	20.1	28.3
Needs Improvement	35	9.0	12.2
Hard Work	30	7.7	10.5
Allows for Creativity/ Diversity	4	1.0	1.4
Total	378		

n = 286 100%

This question elicited a total of 378 responses. Students overwhelmingly described teaching as either an important profession (43.7%) ("I have a great deal of respect for teachers. In my opinion they have the most important profession of all") or a rewarding profession (39.5%) ("Teaching can be very satisfying; that satisfaction comes from knowing that you've helped shape a

person's character; helped a student to think; helped him to deal with life"). An additional 28.3% of the respondents commented on the lack of recognition teachers receive, noting that teaching was in their estimation undervalued by society. Many of those making such comments qualified them by describing the critical role teachers play in the lives of children, or the difficulty and complexity of the teacher's job.

Clearly many of these students view the teaching profession as having a signficant role to play in society despite recognized job disadvantages.

The researchers noted a definite shift in perspective in comparing responses to the Fall 1983 and Spring 1984 surveys with the responses to the Pilot Survey (Spring 1983). The Pilot responses to this item reflected more negative images and comments about the teaching profession, while the current survey reflected more positive comments. Although students recognized that status was still a question (pay, conditions, etc.), and that the profession needed improvement, they seemed more hopeful that the image and realities of teaching were changing for the better. "Teaching is Hard Work" emerging as a category is also significant. This was not mentioned in the pilot sample.

Table 12

What Entry Level Students Hope To Accomplish As Teachers

Categories of Accomplishment	Number of Responses	Percent of Responses	Percent of Respondents
Motivate Students to Learn	99	23.9	34.3
Prepare Students For the World	74	17.8	25.6
Self-Satisfaction	54	13.0	18.7
Be the Best Teacher I can	49	11.8	17.0
Have Positive Interactions	42	10.1	14.5
Interest Students in Subject	40	9.6	13.8
Develop Good Education Programs	23	5.5	8.0
Help Students Develop Potential	18	4.3	6.2
Be Liked and Respected	15	3.6	5.2
Earn a Living	1	0.2	0.3
	n = 289	100%	

"Motivating students to learn" comprised the largest category of responses (34%). One-fourth of the respondents identified "preparing students for the world as a goal. Responses in this category reflected concern for students' learning and well being after they finished formal schooling. "Self-satisfaction" was another category mentioned frequently (18.7% of respondents). Generally these responses indicated a desire to feel that they made a difference to a child. Seventeen percent of the respondents simply indicated that they wanted to do the best job they possibly could, while one respondent reported "earning a living" as the goal.

Thirteen percent (13%) specifically wanted to interest students in the subject area; while 8% wanted to develop good programs. This latter category was mentioned by music education majors particularly.

Even after mutually exclusive categories of attitudes were derived, the number and percentages do not adequately reflect the richness of the responses. The following quotations represent some of the typical attitudes toward teaching expressed by the students:

"I have always wanted to be a teacher and nothing can change my mind. When I was in school my teachers gave me many opportunities to improve myself. I want to give my students the same opportunities."

"I never realized the field of teaching was so complex."

"I feel it is an up and coming profession, on the way to getting the recognition it deserves."

"Teaching is vastly underesteemed. Our best minds should be our teachers."

Being a good teacher requires long hours and much patience."

"Teachers play such an important role in the development of children and young adults, (indirectly as well as directly). It is marvelous 'to help'."

"Teaching keeps a person motivated and challenged professionally and personally. Working with those younger keeps one young."

"The most valuable part of teaching is being able to share knowledge with others. I hope that I can get students interested in learning more on their own after they leave my class."

"I believe teaching is an honorable profession, a profession one should not take lightly. Teachers set examples for students."

ATTITUDES TOWARD STUDENTS

Survey participants were asked to respond to the following questions:

- What do you look forward to in your relationships with students?
- What concerns do you have about working with students?
- What do you believe a teacher's attitude toward students should be?

Table 13

What Entry Level Students Look Forward
To In Their Relationships with Students

Look Forward To . . .	Number of Responses	Percent of Responses	Percent of Respondents
Getting to Know Students	126	31.0	39.5
Help Students Learn	89	21.9	27.9
Having Mutual Respect	60	14.7	18.8
Observing Growth/Development	47	11.5	14.7
Learning From Students	42	10.3	13.2
Enriching Students' Lives	35	8.6	11.0
Providing Motivating Experiences	8	2.0	2.5

n = 319 100%

Perhaps the only surprise in this array of responses is that the #1 response was "Getting to Know Students" (39.5%). This took priority over "Helping Students Learn" (27.9%). It is not so surprising, however, when seen in light of the #1 influence in choosing teaching as a profession: "Enjoy working with children/people." It is also in line with the second most frequently mentioned influence: "Helping Others Learn" (See Table 8).

Additional analysis showed that when examining students' commitment to teaching in terms of what they look forward to in their relationships with students--respondents who rated their commitment high ("favorable" or "very sure") also mentioned "getting to know students" and "helping students learn" more frequently than the other categories.

Table 14

Entry Level Students' Concerns
About Working With Children/Adolescents

Concerns	Number of Responses	Percent of Responses	Percent of Respondents
Doubt Teaching Ability	55	32.9	36.9
Relationships with Students	36	21.6	24.2
Discipline Problems	34	20.4	22.8
Personal Attributes	21	12.6	14.1
Lack of Student Motivation	15	9.0	10.1
Relationships with Adults	6	3.6	4.0

n = 149 100%

Many students either did not respond to this question or indicated that they had no particular worries. Of those 149 who did indicate their concerns, the majority (36.9%) most frequently described doubts about their ability to teach effectively. Their comments reflected concerns about reaching all levels of learners, particularly the learner with special needs, as well as their ability to be interesting. A significant number (24.2%) expressed worries about relating to students. Most of these comments had to do with establishing rapport, being patient, being a model. Twenty-two percent (22.8%) worried about discipline; many of these comments related to maintaining respect of the students. A number of respondents were worried about personal deficiencies: speaking in front of a group, fear of teacher burnout/stress.

Several students expressed concern about students who simply weren't interested or motivated (10.1%); only a few (4%) mentioned working with other adults (administrators, parents, other teachers) as a potential problem.

Further analysis showed that secondary majors much more frequently cited discipline as a worry than K-12 or elementary majors. The category "doubt teaching ability" was mentioned as the highest priority worry for all certification levels (K-12; secondary; elementary).

The nature of the responses to this question reflects serious thought on the part of these students about the diverse roles involved in teaching. The concerns of entry level students could provide an important source of information for program planning and advising.

Table 15

Entry Level Students' Perceptions
of What a Teacher's Attitude Toward Students Should Be

Teacher's Attitude Should Be . . .	Number of Responses	Percent of Responses	Percent of Responses
Positive Attitude	147	37.2	46.5
Mutual Respect	142	35.9	44.9
Helping Students Learn	48	12.2	15.2
Friendly, but Professional	40	10.1	12.7
Learning From Students	11	2.8	3.5
Being a Model	7	1.8	2.2
	n = 316	100%	

The overwhelming response to this question centers on having a positive attitude (46.5%) ("be warm and caring", "want to be there"; "be open and considerate"; "really like children"; etc.) and having mutual respect (44.9%) ("respect individuals"; "be fair"; "treat kids as people", etc.). Other words which appeared frequently were: "friendliness", "enjoyment" and "enthusiasm". When respondents cited "Helping Students Learn", they often referred to being available to help learners.

When response to this question was analyzed in terms of certification levels, these same two categories (Mutual Respect and Postiive Attitude) received highest priority for K-12, secondary and elementary majors.

Further analysis indicated that more respondents who felt favorably inclined or verysure of teaching mentioned the two categories of "Mutual Respect" and "Positive Attitude" than they mentioned the other categories. Clearly for those students most committed to teaching at this point, these two categories represented their strongest feelings about what a teacher's attitude toward students should be.

CAREER GOALS

What do you want to be doing professionally when you are 25-40-65?

Table 16

Entry Level Students' Career Goals at Ages 25-40-65

Goal	Age 25 Percent of Responses	Age 40 Percent of Responses	Age 65 Percent of Responses
Teach (K-12)	80.0	45.4	22.3
Another Profession	11.6	16.1	7.7
Graduate School	10.0	11.2	0.0
Education Related Profession	6.5	18.1	19.2
Teach in College	3.5	15.3	6.2
Administration	0.6	10.4	4.6
Retire	0.0	1.2	49.2
	n = 310	n = 249	n = 130

At age 25, 80% of these entry level students see themselves teaching in classrooms (K-12). Eleven percent (11.6%) feel they will be in a profession other than teaching. (This is consistent with the number reporting reasons for leaving teaching (12.8%) [Table 9].) About 10% see themselves pursuing graduate level work at this point; while 6.5% see themselves in education fields other than classroom teaching (running day care centers, counseling, etc.) A few go on to college teaching and a very few (0.6%) envision school administration as a goal.

At age 40, 45.4% still see themselves teaching in classrooms; more have found another profession (16.1%), some continue graduate study (11.2%). Fifteen percent (15.3%) describe themselves teaching at the college level; ten percent (10.4%) are now school administrators, while 18.1% are still in educated related professions. A few optimistic souls, envision retirement at 40 (1.2%).

By age 65, 49.2% of our population wants to be retired. [Although in their narratives, many respondents qualified this by stating that they would be pursuing new goals at retirement]. Indeed 60% of the population perceive themselves as professionally active at age 65. Only 22.3% of these say they still want to be teaching in classrooms, the rest see themselves involved in work: 19.2% in education related jobs; 7.7% in other professions; 6.2% teaching college; and 4.6% in administration.

Students' Career goals ranged from the very general:

"I plan to be an elementary school teacher. I want to work with children from the day I start work to the day I retire."

To the very specific:

"age 25 -- teaching in a rural community and playing music on the side
age 40 -- leading a major college band and playing professionally
age 65 -- writing (composing). Giving private lessons and teaching part-time out of a university"

To the Tentative:

"I'm not sure. First I'd like to see how I am at teaching, and from there decide".

As students attempted to project their goals from ages 25 through 40 to 65, the number of responses became fewer.

Summary:

PROFILE OF EDUCATION STUDENTS AT ENTRY

How Do Students Feel About a Career in Teaching After One Semester in Education?

Nearly 52% are "very sure they want to teach"; 36% are "still favorably inclined"; 5.6% express neutrality; 4.5% are "doubtful"; and 2% indicate they are "definitely not interested in becoming a teacher". It seems that about 88% of our entry level students are strongly committed to teaching as a career, while about 12% are experiencing doubts or negative reactions.

Why Have Those 12% Changed Their Minds About Teaching?

About one-third of the students responding to this item have been influenced by negative image of the profession. Over 50% however, identified their own incompatability with teaching as the major factor.

What Prompted Students To Choose Teaching As a Profession?

"The enjoyment of working with children and people" (50.3%), and "the desire to help others learn" (26.3%) seem to be the major motivators for these students. "Interest in the subject matter" was cited next most frequently (19.9%), followed by "the act of teaching itself"(14.3%). These were the four top factors. Like students in similar recent research, these students appear to be more intrinsically motivated ("my personal experiences with children", "I like to work with people"; "I love music and want to teach it"), than extrinsically motivated, i.e. influenced by other adults or by external rewards like "summers off".

What Attitudes About Teaching Do These Students Hold?

In general students felt teaching was an important (43.7%), rewarding (39.5%) underrated (28.3%), and difficult (12.2%) profession. Their attitudes about the value of the teaching profession indicates that they view the profession as having a significant role to play in the future of society in spite of identified job disadvantages.

In describing what they hope to accomplish as teachers the majority cite motivating students to learn/seeing results of their teaching (34.3%). Also high on their list of teaching goals is preparing students for the world (25.6%). Self satisfaction (8.7%) and "being the best teacher I can" (17%) were also cited as goals. Some students want to interest students in the subject matter (14.5%), and provide positive interactions (13.8%).

What Are Students' Attitudes Toward Children/Youth?

In their relationship with learners, these students most look forward to getting to know their students (39.5%) and helping students learn (27.9%). In addition they looked forward to providing an atmosphere of mutual respect (18.8%), observing growth (14.7%), learning from students (13.2%), and providing motivating and enriching experiences (13.5%).

Their concerns or worries centered on doubts about their teaching skills, especially reaching all children (36.9%), their relationships with students (24.2%), and anticipation of discipline problems, especially with adolescent learners (22.8%). Others mentioned personal attributes like fear of speaking before a group or fear of burnout (14.1%), lack of student interest (10.1%), and relationships with other adults (4%).

Most respondents felt a teacher's attitude toward students should be positive (46.5%) and focus on mutual respect (44.9%). The remaining responses portrayed a teacher who is willing/available to help students learn, who is friendly but in control, and who is willing to learn from students while remaining a good model.

What Are These Students' Career Goals?

The majority perceive themselves remaining in the classroom or in education related professions throughout their careers. Although 36 respondents indicated they could probably be in "another profession" by age 25, most indicated a high level of seriousness in long term commitment to the teaching profession. Many of these students (50.8%) see themselves as professionally active beyond age 65.

Implications

The attitude profile is an initial attempt to become sensitive to the attitudes and level of commitment of those young women and men who are preparing for the profession of teaching. The refinement and systematic use of such a profile can benefit educational efforts on at least three levels: The Teacher Preparation Program level, the pre-program level and the post-program level.

At the teacher preparation program level, the attitude profile can assist in the screening and advising of entering students. For example, specific coursework can be suggested for those students concerned with working with exceptional children in a traditional classroom or those concerned with speaking in front of groups. For students who are experiencing serious doubts about teaching individual counseling sessions could be arranged to assist them in clarifying their own interests and goals. For those students who are no longer interested in teaching as a career, other professions may be suggested which incorporate the attitudes which led them to enter teaching originally.

Additionally, program development and evaluation efforts can be strengthened with this additional data source.

At the pre-program level, recruitment of high school and pre-professional students can be directed in a more efficient and systematic manner, focusing on those aspects of the teaching profession that appeal most influential to our entering students.

At the level of post-program concern, inclusion of the attitude profile with achievement-oriented profiles, may eventually inable us to anticipate the relationship of student attitudes at entry/exit to teaching behaviors in the field.

Concluding Comments

Taken as a whole the response from this population of entry level students reveal a group of young adults who possess the kinds of attitudes, motivation and commitment to the teaching profession that is vital in creating learning environments in schools that are caring, open and challenging. The types of persons who seek to become teachers do not appear to be on the bottom rung of the ladder in terms of their belief in the value of the teaching/learning process. They appear to be persons who seek a profession that will give them an opportunity to act on their beliefs.

Of course, data collected through attitude profiles will only be useful if those responsible for selecting, advising and training young adults for the profession of teaching, believe that motivation, attitude and a sense of commitment are significant factors in shaping effective teachers.

Refinements in collecting, recording and responsibly using such data remain challenging tasks for the educator and researcher. Ultimately, perhaps, the most difficult task will be evaluating the long term usefulness of such data in predicting a person's effectiveness in the field.

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